

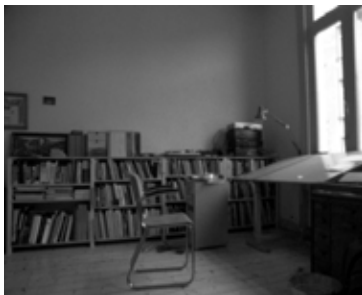
# progress?

*In January 2010 MWM\* defined its “extended drawing” concept and project within the confines of KULeuven’s IvOK\*\* program. The project officially departed on its it’s venture in September 2010. In a nutshell, “extended drawing” is an inquiry into image manipulations of embryonic (design) drawings and into whether the treating of images has a possible influence on designerly processes. In order to explore its thesis, the project defined several research tools : drawing rudiments (basic movements within designerly drawing), conceptualising architectural cases (to test manipulative processes), installing a MWMWorkshop (to carry out research into different manipulative processes) and delineate a theoretical framework based upon the practical implications of the afore mentioned tools and the thesis of improvised movements within the designerly drawing process. The project has both a personal and an educational component, and all the different tools and components work together to inspire each other’s elaboration. What follows is to be considered as a work in progress, an account of some of the things that are currently shaping the project and its it’s thinking.*

*\*Messing With Media | \*\*Instituut voor Onderzoek in de Kunsten, or Institute for Research in the Arts)*

Dear reader,

\*MWM (MessingWithMedia), as a research concept, is considered to be a plural entity. MWM\* defines and develops its "extended drawing" project and both the concept and the project are fuelled by "u" as an individual researcher. Confusing as it may sound, in the following pages, the vantage points may possibly jump from first to second to third person, which won't help the confusion. One must keep in mind that within the project, different writing directions and altering vantage points are considered to be an integral part of the investigations.



## Q: What have you been up to lately?

### ◇ drawing

The "extended drawing" project explicitly mentions re-examining the practice of drawing through, in a way, re-learning how to draw. So I bought myself a daybook, some pens, some pencils and started drawing (again). Drawing things around me, drawing design, drawing curricular assignments, drawing for fun, drawing to confront myself with my inability to draw (certain things) well. The idea is to draw (as much as time allows me) in order to practise skills, to test things defined within the project, to explore curricular assignments, and to get immersed in within the medium of (designerly) drawing. The act is both confronting and inspiring. Confronting, because after a period of more or less theoretical explorations within the medium it became apparent that some skills had been were lost and needed serious practising. Inspiring, because, on the one hand, this loss of skills enables one to approach the medium once again as if one has to start afresh, but beyond that, it seems that every new drawing brings new insights to the fore which, once again, open up new pathways for inquiry, paths to inquire, whether practically or theoretically.



\*MWM=messingwithmedia

### ◇ designing

"extended drawing" is about drawing within design. This means the project needs designerly problems to inspire the drawing and thinking process. A few months ago Alcazaba (an alter ego of a friend of mine) returned from a tropical island where he had stubbornly purchased a plot of land upon which he intended to build a retreat. I agreed to help through providing ideas for this venture and decided to use the project as a preliminary test case for the "extended drawing" project. And what a test it was... Through accepting Alcazaba's "jazz rock project", the "extended drawing"-thesis experienced its it's first head-on attack.



two pages from the daybook exploring two phases of the Alcazaba hut.

It was clear from the beginning that designing the Alcazaba -hut would be an imaginary process. Alcazaba – being the DIY -man able to work with wood and steel at high speeds and at extremely low costs – wasn't looking for a set of top-down predefined architectural drawings, but rather was looking for a creative second opinion to inspire thinking. When I started sketching ideas, we had already discussed some ideas around a dinner table. From our conversations it was clear that he needed a thematic structure to work around and to serve as a basis for his improvisation. I tried to focus on an easy to build system on a spread within the daybook forcing myself to stack sketches and drawings on top of each other until a moment of designerly satisfaction dawned. I then concluded the process by setting things down on paper through laying things within some scaled drawings. Looking at the finished drawings, I realised it was devoid of any messing with media, not to mention the total absence of extended drawing: whatsoever! *All I had produced were preliminary representations of a simple hut.*



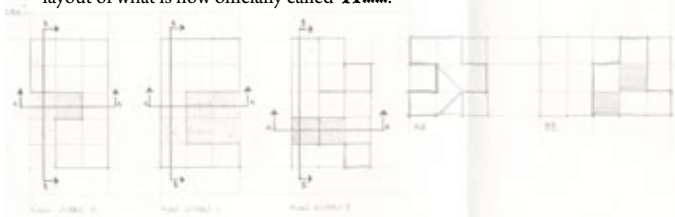
How was I to conceive of this damned PHD, which is based upon the idea of creative layering of media, when my own intuitive process was driving me to a single medium? While I was dealing with disappointment at the final drawings, I convinced myself to drag the drawings over to Alcazaba's palace to discuss the ideas. In the end, the drawings inspired a new thinking process and a more or less more clearly defined conceptual point of view. Alcazaba proposed to shape the thing akin to the shack he had built on his previous trip. The process of drawing his basic concept (without seeing the image of the model he had sent me) confronted me with an echo of something I had designed some years before, and this echo realigned the drawing process and made me start modelling and shaping a new form based on the material qualities of corrugated iron.



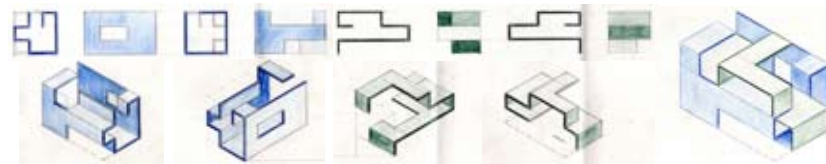
*Alcazaba's temporary shack and his model of the basic idea for the final hut and my sketchy answer to the model.*

### ◇ 14m(w)m: a curricular fest

Sometime last year **MWM** was invited to collaborate on rethinking the way our department introduces architectural novices to the craft of (re-)presenting architectural form, space and design. Suddenly, things we had been thinking about for quite some time became very real. As we sat down with a colleague to discuss a new structure over coffee and some sandwiches, we agreed that: design would have to be the driving force within the assignments. By the end of the afternoon, we had arrived at an open scheme to inspire thinking about possible assignments, after which we parted and somehow lost contact. Around August, feeling the pressure of the coming semester, a roll of paper was unpacked, thereby starting up a process of thinking and drawing which initiated the basic layout of what is now officially called '**14mm**'.



It's goal? To introduce fresh students within the art of imagining architecture through playfully exploring form and space. **14mm** is conceived as a kind of a game that jumps from model making, projective drawing, perspective drawing and communicating design through carving and folding your way through architectural form and space. Each step adds formal, spatial and anthropomorphical complexity to the process.



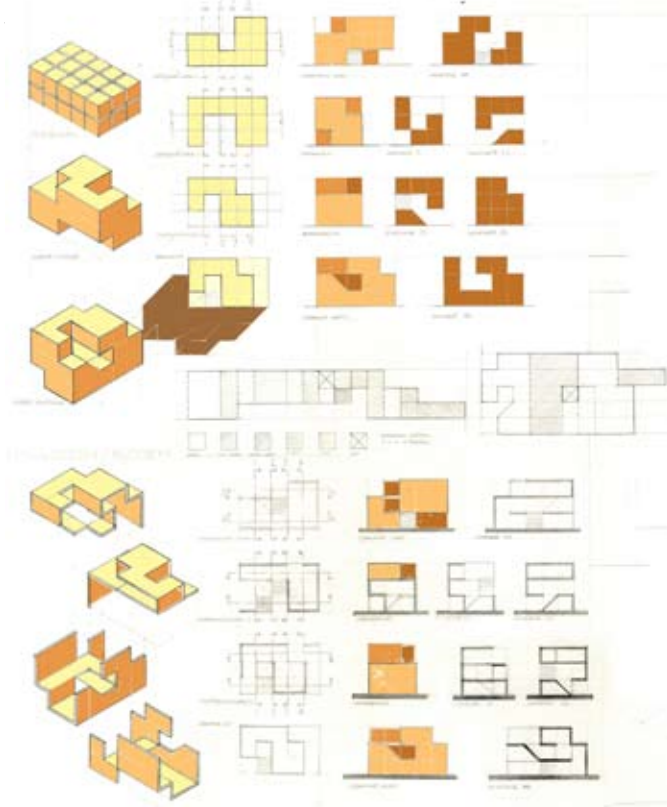
*trying out an arbitrary folding process within 14MM, a first attempt to lay out the exercise's basic movements*

Since the learning process of spatial and perspective drawing is driven by the geometrics of the cube as a basic unit, **MWM** invented an arbitrary process in which cubes are worked and reworked until they become walls, floors, stairs, etc., and finally, to add a notion of scale, a (moving) human body. The process forces one to jump between different modes of representation in order to get a grip on the form and space without breaking any of the exercise's rules.

Since **MWM** designed this thing, we forced ourselves to become an active participants, as well. Keeping track of the assignments through executing them and trying to stay a step ahead of the official participants we discovered difficulties and possible mistakes that one can make, in addition to learning how to approach certain things within the exercise. This is a role that enriches the exercise and what it is meant to teach, since a lot of the participants's problems were the ones we had encountered the night before.

Up until now, **14mm** seems to be doing what it was designed to do, apart from some minory aspects that we will have to work on. The only thing that is presently missing is the infusion of digital actions into the process. The red tape involved in organising courses within academic confines and the switching of professors, classrooms and vantage points appeared to be making this infusion unnecessarily difficult. As we are searching for a design-driven process to approach architectural media, every step, every tool, and every medium is a integral part of the creative process. Incorporating a digital component means actively thinking about (a part of) the process through the use of digital possibilities and convincing a colleague to become an active part within a designerly process too, which requires that the people involved be capable of approaching the exercise both from a technical and from a designerly point of view.





*Rudimentary 14mm is made up out of 3 steps: It starts with carving one's way through a model made up out of 30 cubes. Each cube retrieved has to be reintroduced either on top of the model or, above the first layer on the short side of the model. Next to delineating horizontal and vertical circulation, this step defines a basic geometry of the model leading to a certain formal design. After this first step is illustrated by means of drawings and models, a new problem is given: one has to rework the cube model as two folded strips based on the prior (cuboid) model. The circulation route has to be kept as a void within the two strips, and the strips should be made to follow, if possible, the basic geometry of the former model. Each strip has to touch the back and front of the defining planes, and the strips may touch but may not overlap. In order to fold a new model, the participants have to switch between plan, section, model and sketches; thereby creating a model made up out of walls, floors and circulation. As a final last step (not shown in within the drawings), the participants introduce a notion of human scale through adding parapets, human silhouettes and (optionally) abstracted furniture. The exercise concludes with a large scale presentation of the process through finalised presentation plans and a sketchbook showing the intermediary operations.*

Ultimately, to keep things within limits we decided to approach the digital realm as a separate module within the course. Hopefully next year the administrators will provide us with a more flexible schedule, which could open up opportunities for a more open structure within the exercise, thus enabling us to easily jump media driven by the game or process. Sometime in February 2011 we will introduce the follow-up of **14mm: 24mm**. Where **14mm** has already has proven that game structures are able to force participants to think between media in order to discover form and space, we are now in the process course of designing and inventing a similar, design driven, scheme for **24mm**, all the while keeping in mind that **24mm** involves a very ambitious and wide scope of media and techniques...

### ◇ initializing the mwmworkshop...

Within every account we hope to show some output of what was previously known as the **MWM-lab**. Again we have to disappoint you. It seems that the only thing we can share about upon the matter is a conceptual name change. While reading Richard Sennett's views on upon medieval workshops\* as institutions to motivate craftsmanship, it became clear to us that the concept of the workshop fitted our intentions better more than the scientifically laden concept of the laboratory. According to Sennett, within craft workshops several people work(ed) together towards a collective goal, augmenting each other's skills through exchanging the skills of the craft - and tacit knowledge. Thus the craft developed and evolved itself through doing this within a more or less contained environment. Through messing with media and extending the drawing process, our goal is to expand the concept of architectural drawing and release it from its narrow vision of resolution, production and economics by working together on the material, images and ideas at hand. Our poster on the next page is an effort to summarise the aims of the **MWMWorkshop**.

So where are we at? Well, it seems that installing something like an analogue lab within a departmental structure takes a lot of patience and convincing in order to get the green light and some sort of a budget to start equipping it. The nerves and frustration of repeatedly going through the administrative mumbo jumbo to get something some things done was one of the driving forces that pushed us back to drawing, because at least this was something we could do while waiting for yet another response to an application we had submitted for some departmental funding. In the end all we need is some of that hard cash necessary to start looking for machinery. Since most of the material we are looking for is to be found in within second- hand markets, it's quite necessary to have a clear and complete budget so that we can easily respond to the opportunities that present themselves. Up until now, there is neither a space nor a budget—only concepts.

\*see Richard Sennett: The Craftsman [Yale University Press, 2008]



The workshop poster. The main idea is to fill a space with different machines, interfaces and tools in order to create a place where one can improvise with architectural drawing in its widest sense and in order to inquire whether changes and alterations within drawings can influence the evolution of an embryonic designerly conception.

only concepts.

now,  
there is  
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## ◇ the media research group!i

Next to looking for means to outfit our workshop we\* are currently framing a collaboration with the Ghent **MiMeLab** with whom we have collectively defined a research group encompassing both campuses with an intent on hybrid media (ab)use. In november we got together for a first time to share our views with a group of interested colleagues which unintentionally fired us into a lively discussion upon the status of the research group within its greater environment and gather potential allies in order to get started the discussion focussed upon the consequences of narrowing down to media as focal point of our research group and whether we should expand our framework to a bigger pool of researchers within the course group. The "media" research group was initiated partly because we seem to meet in a growing field of inquiry and feel an urge to manifest our department within that field. Our focus on process and the role media plays within that process diliniates a broad area of potential research and projects we are studying from an architectural point of view. Our humble goal is to fuse projects within a specific knowledge field through connecting researchers with an intent on the creative (ab)use of intermediary tools within designerly processes.

Next to bringing together and collaborating with similar minded people the re-  
search group intends to develop as a community within the growing faculty research  
pool through being accounted for a specific research area within this larger entity.  
Within this view the "lab-spaces" are considered as meeting places and workshops  
within both campuses which collaborate to explore, stimulate and produce tena-  
cious research(ed) output. While the department's structure urges us to consider  
two seperate spaces (one for each campus) our personal intrests and focusses  
led us to define two complementary units. Within the Brussels campus **MWM**  
conceptualises an analogue workshop with an intent on drawing as a generator  
of design while Ghent installed a more digitally oriented lab which focusses on  
the physical and virtual model and it's role within design. Both chapters cross  
over from digital to analogue and back again and intend to inspire each others  
elaboration.

\* The 'we' within this context refers to the research group as defined by Corneel Cannnaerts and myself.

## Q: what about improvisation and next steps?

Our current state is best defined by the term: **woodshedding**. According to the online “urban dictionary”, woodshedding means “to practice or hone skills, particularly musical skills. The origin is from the fact that for purposes of privacy people would go to their woodshed to practice without being overheard.” Translating this concept to improvisation within our project, we could say that we are (privately) exploring (different) paths for approaching the ideas within our thesis, design, graphical processes and curricular developments.



Returning to the practice of drawing could be understood as a form of woodshedding: inquiring and practising things in order to broaden a personal vocabulary and skills. The daybook, then, becomes a woodshed. Every other week, some of those typical drawing instruction books are scanned in search of information, skills and techniques for developing a set of drawing rudiments (basic movements within designerly drawing). Within the project, the rudiments are considered to be as a means of freeing oneself from certain constraints when working drawingly towards design conceptions. Instead of focussing on accurateness, extended drawing searches for intuitive knowledge within one's possibilities for drawing and reworking designerly ideas.



Basic movements according to Chip Sullivan. Trying out the rudiments... the next steps would include exploring the rudiments within the geometrical shaping, tone and shadows.

**14mm** has hints of improvisation as well. Since the exercise concerns learning to visualise design and architecture, we searched for ways to minimise the actual practice of designing, while keeping design as a generator of the drawings and images. The gamesque structure forces participants to accept previous steps and build upon them. In a sense the participants are improvising with form and space. Up until now we have not explicitly communicated **14mm**'s improvised qualities in order to avoid a certain confusion about the core of the exercise. The inventing and starting up of a new learning process creates a certain wariness and it seemed to us that mentioning research related preoccupations would run the risk of hampering the process altogether.

So what's next? As mentioned earlier on, the act of drawing and exploring design seems to be inspiring new directions within the project. Unintentionally, the Alcazaba process, which was initiated as a preliminary design case, gave rise to a conceptual stance regarding a further development of possible design cases within the project. Before we dwell on this matter any further, we should to note that what follows is based on a very intuitive hunch, a blurry under-researched hunch for that matter, but nevertheless also a promising one.



Alcazaba's new scheme instigated a change in conceptual and stylistic vantage point, which called for another generating medium and process. It also forced us to think about and work with a wider array of media, as opposed to the monodisciplinary drawings of the previous phase. The shift gave rise to the question as to whether stylistic points of view channelises technical or media improvisation and, if so, is it something one can approach consciously or is it full blown intuition, whatever that may mean?

From there on, we were thrown back to the concept of eclecticism: *deriving ideas, style, or taste from a broad and diverse range of sources* (Oxford Dictionary), or the idea of being elusive to catalogue and listing as a certain quality of personality rather than as a proof of a lack of creativity or even charlatanism. Translating the concept into towards extended drawing led to the idea of defining our cases as (virtual) projects arbitrarily linked to certain stylistic vantage point(s). The architectural styles would then become vehicles for inspiring designerly directions, with the stylistic elements being treated as loose thematic structures to be played around with. Admittedly, infusing style into design is a tricky concept that

calls for taking a firm stance towards its formalistic connotations. But, again, the idea is preliminary and fuzzy, but through reflecting upon the idea of eclecticism within the project we got an echo of ***the drawing we have used***

***to introduce the conference  
zine... that's when we thought  
why not throw that concept  
into the project as well***

[to be continued]®<sup>122010</sup>

